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STATINTL

Hearings Held in Minneapolis on War in Vietnam—II

EXTENSION OF REMARKS
OF

HON. DONALD M. FRASER

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 19, 1966

Mr. FRASER. Mr. Speaker, continuing the presentation of the views expressed at the Minneapolis hearings on Vietnam, I have the pleasure of presenting the testimony of Romeyn Taylor, associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota, and Rodney C. Loehr, professor of history at the University of Minnesota.

These hearings were an attempt to look beyond the day-to-day events of the way and to analyze its implications for the people of Vietnam and its lessons for the United States. The testimony illustrates the excellent insights of the expert witnesses into the problems. The wisdom presented here will be important far into the future.

The testimony of Romeyn Taylor and Rodney C. Loehr follows:

Romeyn Taylor: "This statement prepared by me for Representative DONALD FRASER'S hearings in Minneapolis, December 7, 1965 represents my own views only and not that of any organization."

U.S. Foreign policy in the Far East since WW II appears to have been focused, as in other parts of the world on the containment of Communism. The practical definition of containment, however, cannot be the same in different time and different areas. In Europe, the policy of containment was generally successful. Here, military assistance, the NATO system of collective security and the programs of economic aid got good results. The states we supported in central and western Europe were already committed to non-Communist traditions of government and representative institutions. Moreover, they possessed, at least collectively, the skills and natural resources necessary to create and maintain military power on a very large scale. Little more than an infusion of U.S. capital and a certain amount of enlightened cooperation among the nations concerned were needed to create a firm obstacle to Russian expansion westward. At the same time, economic recovery prevented the massive social disturbances without which Communist revolution could hardly have been attempted. The definition of the problem of containment and the means used to implement it in Europe, however, cannot easily be transfered to Southeast Asia. This is not mere speculation: we have tried it and on the whole, it has worked poorly.

In Southeast Asia, several economically weak and politically unstable states are arranged on or near the southern periphery of China, a nation that outnumbers all the Southeast Asian states together by about four to one in population and is relatively stable politically. The problem here was to prevent these peripheral states from aligning themselves with China to our own strategic advantage. Two general approaches to this problem have been, one: the neutralization of the area under collective guarantee by the leading states on both sides of the cold war. This approach is represented by the Geneva Conference of 1954 and was strongly advocated at that time by India, itself a neutralist state. While the United States participated in this conference, it appears to have done so with some reluctance and proceeded to implement the other approach, namely the application, or misapplication, of the methods employed successfully in Europe. This was expressed in SEATO, the South East Asia Treaty Organization, which was created in the same year. SEATO was logically incompatible with the Geneva approach since it implied a Western alignment, instead of neutrality, of the Southeast Asian members.

It may be argued, therefore, that we have made it impossible to give neutralization a fair trial. Our course in this regard can only be justified if it can be shown to have been highly successful. For a number of reasons it has, on the contrary, worked poorly. The weakness of the Southeast Asian members has resulted in their having to permit the establishment of U.S. military bases on their territory, in some cases close to the Chinese frontier. This has furnished China with a strong reason to apply pressure by taking advantage of their extreme vulnerability to organized internal opposition from the left. Other states, such as Cambodia and Burma have avoided alignment with the West for this reason and have remained outside of SEATO, thereby greatly weakening the organization. Moreover, the advantages of alignment with the U S. seem uncertain at best. Our enormous investment in defense of the various Saigon regimes has not only failed to nullify the effectiveness of the militant left, but has escalated the internal struggle to a degree that threatens the devastation of the entire state. Far from encouraging other Southeast Asian states to associate themselevs with us in this manner, it is more likely in the long run to persuade them that this is the most dangerous of all possible policies.

Another defect of the containment approach is that its economic phase necessarily produces results very different than in Europe and may sometimes work against our political objectives. In Europe, we were underwriting the restoration of developed industrial societies. In Southeast Asia, we hope to foster the industrialization of predominantly non-industrial societies. This demands a profound change in their cultures and their institutions. Such change in turn results in sharp internal conflicts that may take political or even military form. Since internal order is necessary for economic development, this creates a presumption in favor of authoritarian governmental forms as against the kind of open and representative forms that we would favor on ideological grounds. Moreover, the authoritarian left has a distinct advantage over the right.

While there have been some durable authoritarian regimes of the right, these have generally occurred in Europe, where there was a relatively secure conservative middle-class base, as in Spain or Portugal. Such a social base is largely absent in Southeast Asia, and where it exists, it is likely to be partly Chinese, and therefore to this extent, by attraction of the home country, inclined to the left. Moreover, rightist distatorships have not generally had a good record in economic development. Nationalist China might be cited on Taiwan as a small example to the contrary, but here there are the peculiar circumstances of rule by cohesive and powerful refugee elite and investment of U.S. capital on a scale which it might be impossible to repeat for other states. The political left, on the other hand, by involving great numbers of the population in revolutionary political or even military action, achieves strong psychological identification with many or most of the population. This it turn makes the party or governmental organization strong enough to carry out the costly and difficult tasks of capitalizing industrial and agricultural development. On this score, the Asian Communist states of China, North Korea and North Vietnam appear to have done fairly well. The authoritarian left, therefore, has real solutions for real problems. Whether the price paid in the form of state control of much social and intellectual activity is really worth the gains is hardly a question we should presume to answer for other peoples. In terms of their cultural traditions, which are very different from our own, the cost may not be as high as it would seem to us.

In the fact of these adverse factors, our application of the containment principle to the National Liberation movement in Vietnam and perhaps elsewhere amounts to the exercise of a U.S. veto with military force over certain real and not wholly unreasonable political tendencies in some of the economically underdeveloped countries. One effect of this is to place leadership of anti-western nationalism in the hands of the left, and under certain conditions, as in Vietnam, this may help them greatly. In passing, it should be noted that the arguments sometime advanced in support of our present policy that the NLF's resort to violence creates a moral obligation for outside powers to intervene against it is absurd. If this principle were generalized, all nations would be obliged to keep the democratic practices of their neighbors under critical review and intervene when they found force being used improperly. Moreover, it would be difficult in Vietnam to say whether Ngo Dien Diem or Ho Chi-Minh was the more responsible for the non-existence of political democracy in their country, since both appear to have been opposed to it from the start. To define the revolutionary war in Vietnam as an instance of international aggression is a transparent effort to force it into the category of problems that our policy of containment was intended to cope with.

Our failure in Vietnam does not mean that we should cease to support democratic leaders against their authoritarian rivals on the left and right, but it does mean, that we must distinguish between those cases where such support has a reasonable chance of achieving its intended result and those cases where our intervention is simply destructive. We must also recognize that we cannot substitute for or create indigenous leadership as we have tried to do in Laos and Vietnam with uniformly disastrous results. This necessary condition of democratic development is one that must be provided by the people in question. Where it is lacking, we must try to live with the result and not try inappropriately by military means to force upon them governmental forms that have no relation to their culture and experience. What are the implications of such a change in policy toward SEAsia? In a general sense, this points to a return to the Geneva approach of protected neutrality for those states that desire it and the acceptance of leftist control where it is already an accomplished fact. It also calls for the gradual replacement of the Western oriented system of collective security in SEATO by joint guarantees by the major Communist and non-Communist powers. China's adherence should become a major goal of our policy and to secure it, we should show our readiness to discuss all major issues now dividing the two countries.

We must also face the fact that to hope for neutralization of Vietnam at this very late date may be unrealistic. Our war there can probably be ended only if we make it clear to the Saigon Military that we will not win their war for them and they will either have to win it themselves with limited assistance or, which is more likely, make their own arrangements with the NFL and Hanoi in a reconvened Geneva Conference. If, as is likely, this results in a leftist or even Communist government in the south under Hanoi's political control, we should then undertake to encourage Vietnamese independence of Peking as we have encouraged Yugoslavia's independence of Moscow. This

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alternative, unpalatable though it may be, is preferable to our present self-defeating military involvement. Much of the pressure on Laos, Cambodia and Thailand that has been created by the war in Vietnam would be removed and they could more easily move towards neutralism from their present positions on the left and right. The net effect of such a policy would not be to surrender any positions of real strength in Southeast Asia but to acknowledge forthrightly certain weaknesses of our position that can no longer be concealed. Given the present state of world opinion, this would enhance rather than diminish our prestige and give us a chance to use our immense economic resources constructively in SEAsia. For the long run, perhaps the most important advantage would be that we would have taken the first hard step toward removing certain unnecessary grounds of Sino-U.S. hostility. The outlook here is not altogether bad. The Chinese have compensated for the reduction on their trade with the other Communist countries since the Sino-Soviet split, by expanding their trade with the West. The problem of Taiwan, which is very much a thorn in China's side should be more possible of solution with every passing year. The time is ripe for a policy of mutual accommodation and we should not refuse to take the first steps.

STATEMENT PRESENTED AT HEARINGS OF THE HONORABLE DONALD FRASER BY PROF. RODNEY C. LOEHR, DECEMBER 7, 1965

My name is Rodney C. Loehr. I am a professor of history at the University of Minnesota. During World War II, I was the Historical Officer for the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. From 1951–1953 I was Special Historian in the Office of the United States High Commissioner for Germany.

In response to your questions may I present the following viewpoints:

Question No. I. What role might the United Nations play in Vietnam?

Answer. It is first necessary to get the United Nations to agree to work in Vietnam. Provided that the U.N. is willing to undertake responsibilities in Vietnam, the U.N. might play the following roles:

(a) The U.N. can act as a medium of communication between us and our adversaries. This role can be taken immediately by the Secretary.

(b) The U.N. can supervise or police any agreement reached between us and our adversaries. This role envisages a peace settlement sometime in the future.

(c) The U.N. can act as a channel for economic aid which a future agreement might promise for the region of Southeast Asia, such as the proposed Mekong river development. This role is something for the far distant future.

Question No. II. What more should the United States do to assist the government of Vietnam in the development of stable political institutions.

Answer. Our objective appears to be to have an independent government in South Vietnam that is capable fo governing in its own interests and not to have just a puppet government. To achieve such an independent government favorable conditions must be created and this means ending the invasion by North Vietnam, quelling the insurgency and establishing law and order. Before we can help South Vietnam develop stable political institutions, we must be able to identify the problems involved. The situation is more complex than just a struggle between Communists and anti-Communists. Various religious and ethnic groups are involved. The government of South Vietnam today is city-oriented and a better balance between city and country is needed. Before anything is done we need a wider base of information. Most of the information probably is available now and can be secured from the Special Forces, CIA, MAG, AID, medical people and missionaries. I suggest that an independent presidential commission, somewhat on the order of the Taft Commission that functioned so successfully in the Philippine Islands around the turn of the century at the time of the Philippine rebellion, be formed to study the situation in South Vietnam and to make recommendations for the creation of a stable situation there. Such a commission would be able to take a long look at the situation and this is something that operating agencies cannot do, since they are involved in daily crises. Such a commission would also have the prestige needed to have its recommendations influence policy. If such a commission cannot be created, then let one of the national foundations finance a national committee to do the same work.

In the meantime we can send professional people to train administrators and others in the region. AID and the Peace Corps can play a larger role, and economic and technical aid can be increased. However, we should have firm guarantees about the use to which the aid is put, and we should install some kind of inspection system to make sure that the aid does what it is supposed to do. In connections with aid, it should be noted that we may need to send large supplies of rice to South Vietnam in the near future because of the Viet Cong blockade of the cities, and that this rice must come from our own supplies or from purchases. In the end what we do in South Vietnam will depend upon the limits we place upon what we are willing to do.

Questions No. III. What can be done in the way of economic and social development?

Answer. First, we must identify the problems, and try to determine where improvements are needed and where and how they can be made. Whatever is done must be done in terms of Vietnamese culture and needs and not in terms of American culture. For example, it would be senseless to build a so-called model village with a nine-hole golf course and a shell seating 20,000 for the showing of "Hello! Dolly!" Instead, Vietnam can be helped with fertilizer and penicillin factories, improved varieties of rice, improved and simple tools, hospitals and schools that deal with life in Vietnamese terms. Whatever is done must fit a rice subsistence economy. We should buy as much as possible of materials used in the country itself because this will infuse money and labor into the economy. A master plan should be drawn up, based on how much aid we wish to give, that will deal with the infrastructure we hope to create or rebuild. Probably, only in electricity and communications can advanced techniques be applied; the rest will have to be mostly in terms of grass-thatched huts.

Social developments will be a by-product of economic and educational change. Education is badly needed but should always be in terms of Vietnamese culture and needs. Students sent to this country will be lost to Vietnam; education should be in-country training. The experience of the missionaries and Special Forces will be a useful guide for educational projects.

Question No. IV. What should be an acceptable basis for settlement of the conflict in Vietnam?

Answer. We demand that the North Vietnamese and their Chinese advisers get out of South Vietnam. This may appear to them to amount to unconditional surrender. They demand that we get out of South Vietnam, and this certainly amounts to a humiliating and unacceptable demand for our unconditional surrender. Is there a middle ground? Bearing in mind the harsh realities of what has happened, is something short of unconditional surrender acceptable to both sides? Are there dissident elements in South Vietnam that can be accepted in a future peace settlement by the U.S. and the South Vietnamese government? Can a middle ground be discovered? There is where the proposed presidential commission can do great service, since it may be able to suggest political solutions that will end the conflict or at least ease the military burden of the war.

In the meantime we have a number of military options that we can use for trading material to get the North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam. We can increase our ground forces, apply harsher economic sanctions, extend the bombing, inflict a blockade or even offer invasion. From the military standpoint if we are to bring the North Vietnamese to the conference table by military means, we must be able and willing to raise the conflict to an unacceptable level of violence. We have that capability. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind about that.

What are the stakes? The stakes are whether or not we wish to contain the spread of Red China's influence and power in Southeast Asia. Pulling American troops out of Vietnam will not end the killing in that unhappy country but instead may well lead to the slaughter of those who have befriended us. If we do not make a stand in Vietnam, we will have to make a stand somewhere else or else give up the whole area to the Chinese on the mainland. The moment we pull out of Vietnam we will be faced with a similar crisis in Thailand. We can make a stand in Vietnam under relatively favorable conditions that would not exist in other parts of Southeast Asia.

Question No. V. What lessons should be drawn from a decade of United States involvement in Vietnam?

Answer. First, the military lessons: American military units can fight the kind of war now raging in South Vietnam. Our military system is geared to respond to guerrilla warfare and also to the increased guerrilla warfare which uses large organized units and is sometimes called by our adversaries "wars of national liberation."

Secondly, we have learned that insurgent and supporting forces from the outside have increased in almost direct ratio to the increase in American aid. In other words as we have escalated, they have also escalated. But it should be borne in mind that we do have the capability to escalate to levels of violence that are unacceptable to our adversaries.

1961—1,000 Americans were in Vietnam as advisers. It was decided that there should be a massive increase in aid. December saw the first helicopters and in addition we began to provide air support, communications and an increase in the number of advisers. In units where American aid was used the kill ratio was increased. But it was still a hit-and-run war.

1962—The number of American advisers was increased to 20,000.

1963—Diem was killed and the war went badly for a time because of political instability—a good demonstration of the relations between politics and war. Then, General Ke was brought in and some stability was achieved.

1964—PT boats attacked the U.S. Navy and in retaliation PT sites were bombed.

1965—February saw the beginning of massive bombing of North Vietnam sites and March saw the beginning of the big build-up of American forces that has continued. Probably, as a minimum a half a million of American ground forces will be committed to Vietnam, and it may take at least three years before a favorable solution can be reached. The draft will have to be increased and it may be necessary to call to active duty units of the National Guard and Reserve forces.

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